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OBSERVATIONS

ON THE LATE ACT

FOR AUGMENTING THE

SALARIES OF CURATES,

IN FOUR LETTERS TO A FRIEND,

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By EUSEBIUS, Vicar of LILLIPUT.

Joseph Robertson

"There came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to
"take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the
"wayfaring man, that was come unto him, but took the poor
"man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to
"him." 2 SAM. xii. 4.

L O N D O N,

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LETTER I.

SIR,

SEVERAL writers * have given us their sentiments in favour of the Curates Act; and in some cases, I confess, it may have a laudable effect. But there are circumstances, in which it may be pro-

* The writers, mentioned in this and other subsequent passages, are those, whose remarks on the Curates Act have appeared in the Gentleman's Magazine for September, October, and November, in which excellent publication these letters were first printed.

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ductive of great hardships. Above half the livings in the kingdom do not separately amount to 100l. a year; and many of them are not worth 50l. When this is the case, it is a gross and injurious partiality to make the curate the only object of consideration. Let us suppose, what is a very common case, that a clergyman of learning and merit, at an advanced age, has obtained nothing more in the church, than a benefice of 100l. a year. In a short time, want of health, or the natural infirmities of age, hinder him from attending to his parochial duty, and he is obliged to employ a curate. Out of this small income must he be compelled to allow his assistant 70l. or even 60l. a year? Is this consistent with equity and humanity? Or can such a requisition be attended with honour and advantage to the clerical profession?

When

When this unfortunate incumbent has paid his curate, and proper deductions are made for the expence of collecting his tithes ; for claims on the poor, which his benevolence will not suffer him to demand ; for bad debts, procurations, synodals, taxes, first-fruits, tenths, insurance, repairs, and various other contingencies, what a MISERABLE PITTANCE will remain for the support of himself and his family under the increasing debilities of old age !

In the mean time, his curate, a young man of 24, without any incumbrance, comes into the church, and by the authority of the late act, demands the greatest share of the vicarage ; that is, he claims 60, 70, or 80*l.* a year, and the vicar must be content with less than 30*l.* If this is not a hardship, there is no such thing in nature. The grievance is still more to be

lamented, when this additional stipend happens to be taken from learning, merit, and long services, and bestowed on ignorance, levity and dissipation; on a young man, who has slumbered a few years in the lap of his Alma Mater, and entered into holy orders with no other views, than the hopes of enjoying an easy and honourable situation in the Church; or, what is equally despicable, with no other qualifications, than those of a school-boy. There is many a young academic, I confess, who may hereafter be an honour to his profession; but, at the same time, it must be allowed, that, in this licentious and pleasure-loving age, such characters are not the most numerous. It was formerly thought necessary, that a clergyman should be well versed in classical, historical, biblical, and theological learning; but, at present, these preparatory studies are neglected

lected and exploded. Books of real erudition are no longer in request. A Polyglot, the Septuagint, the Fathers, the Sacred Critics, the Ecclesiastical Historians, and even the superior classics, are not to be seen in the libraries of our young divines. Their literary collections consist of plays, novels, poems, miscellaneous essays, or, at best, the evidences of christianity in *epitome*, and a few volumes of fashionable discourses for the use of the pulpit, with other light summer reading. The booksellers at Oxford, at Cambridge, in London, and other places, can bear ample testimony to the truth of these observations.

But we will suppose, that the rector, or the vicar, is a man of inferior abilities, or that he has outlived his faculties, and that his curate is an excellent scholar. In the

first place, we should remember, that the rector, or the vicar, in the days of his infirmity, ought not to be *starved*. In the next place, it is easy for an excellent scholar, in the vigour of youth, to increase the income of a moderate curacy, without oppressing an aged incumbent. Instead of going to the theatre, a horse-race, a card-table, or a ball, he may employ his leisure-hours in a school, in the tuition of youth, or in works of genius, in publications of various kinds. Here is an extensive and an honourable employment. In this manner the greatest men, who have immortalized their names by their excellent writings, have begun their career of glory. It may likewise be observed, that, with such an exertion of his abilities, temperance and frugality will enable a young clergyman to live with more credit on a small annual stipend, than he can on 200l. a year,

a year, if he pays no attention to those virtues, and spends the time, which is not devoted to his curacy, in useless amusements or idler follies.

I therefore conclude, that, by the late act, a provision will frequently be made for indolent and illiterate coxcombs, at their first entrance into the church, to the unjust and intolerable oppression of many a learned and worthy man, who is struggling under the infirmities of old age, with a family, and an income, which, in better days, before this additional requisition, was by no means sufficient to support a respectable character.

These considerations are, in my opinion, so important, and the real income of many rectors and vicars so diminutive, that the governors of the church cannot be too

cautious in the augmentation of curacies. The following lines on this subject were written by one of the minor poets of Utopia; but, I am persuaded, are not applicable to any of our present ecclesiastical rulers. However, as it is possible they may be applicable, in the course of the next century, take them as they are.

*On the Augmentation of Curacies to 70l. or
85l. a Year.*

Our good diocesan, by law,
Promotes his young divines,
But his incumbents, old and poor,
To Providence consigns.

Proceed, my Lord, your care extend,
And make the scheme complete;
You'll find your curates at the PLAY,
Your vicars in the FLEET*.

Yours, &c.

EUSEBIUS.

* A prison for debtors.

LETTER

LETTER II.

SIR,

THE late act for augmenting the salaries of curates is undoubtedly founded on principles of equity and humanity; for every incumbent, who enjoys a valuable benefice, ought in justice to allow his curate a liberal compensation. But let us not forget this excellent maxim:

“ Est modus in rebus, sunt certi denique

“ fines,

“ Quos ultra citraque nequit consistere

“ rectum.”

If

If the value of a living is not above eighty, ninety, or a hundred pounds a year, it cannot, with any degree of reason, be expected, that the greater part of this income should be appropriated to the curate,

A young man has various opportunities and advantages, from which a person, in the latter part of life, is precluded. In a populous parish a curate, who is well beloved, will have continual invitations, and many pecuniary compliments. In a small parish, there cannot be much attendance required; and he may very easily and very properly supply two churches. If he is a scholar, he may increase his income by tuition, or by literary pursuits. If he is no scholar, he should, at least, learn the virtues of temperance and frugality, and, as an ancient writer expresses

expresses it, " bear the yoke in his youth." Whatever his abilities may be, he cannot reasonably expect to obtain an income, at his first entrance into orders, much larger than his principal, who has devoted the best part of his life to the service of the church. After all, the young gentleman is at liberty, either to accept or refuse the appointment,

But what course is a rector or a vicar to pursue, when age or infirmities oblige him to employ a curate? The season for the exertion of his abilities is expired; his hopes of farther preferment are vanished; he has no alternative; he must be content with his miserable pittance. In this case, a stroke of the palsy would not be more afflicting, than an episcopal requisition, an injunction to pay his curate 60, or 70l. a year. With the remnant he
could

could have no better prospect, than that of a hospital, a garret, or a jail.

The statute of the 12th of queen Anne, for the better maintenance of curates in the church of England, authorized a stipend from 20 to 50l. a year. The promoters of this act wisely and prudently considered, that above half the livings in the kingdom would not admit of a greater allowance, without reducing the incumbents to a state of beggary. The case is nearly the same at present. If livings are improved in their value, taxes and all the necessary expences of life are increased in a greater proportion ; and a much heavier load of distress falls on a family, than on a single man.

A great deal of malignant invective has been thrown out against pluralities, and
the

the non-residence of the clergy. Two or three hundred years since, there might be very good reason for these investives, in various instances, where they would be extremely cruel in the present age. An income of 40, or 50l. a year was, at that time, a competency for the incumbent and his family. But in these days, no family, above that of a parish-clerk, can subsist on such an income. The poverty of half the livings in the nation has therefore compelled the clergy to unite, if possible, two humble pieces of preferment, or to reside where they can make other advantages, for the support of their families with propriety and decorum.

Let it here be observed, that I am neither making an apology for the non-residence of the opulent clergy; nor arguing against the late act, when properly applied; I am
only

only pleading the cause of poor rectors and vicars, who may be exceedingly distressed by an episcopal mandate.

I am, &c.

EUSEBIUS.

An advocate for the late act is pleased to say, "He is afraid, that the signature of Eusebius has not been very happily chosen for these letters, as reflecting but little credit on that primitive historian."—The gentleman would scarcely have made this sarcastic remark, if his reading had been a little more extensive, and he had known, that Eusebius was a very common name in ecclesiastical antiquity. A celebrated writer, at the conclusion of his account of Eusebius, bishop of Cæsarea, enumerates above threescore persons of that name: "Alii Eusebii, amplius sexaginta."

LETTER

LETTER III.

SIR,

ONE of my opponents is pleased to tell me, that I have not attended to the first clause of the act; that no such hardships, as I have described, can happen under our present wise and equitable hierarchy. To the illogical reasoning of this writer I shall only reply, that such hardships *actually exist*.

I have as high an opinion, as any one, of our present ecclesiastical governors; but, at the same time, I am sorry, that it should be in the power of any *future* diocesan

cesan to lay an insupportable burden on a poor incumbent.

It will be said, that a bishop can have no motive for an improper application of the act. In answer to this objection, it may be observed, that every man is frequently actuated by strange and unaccountable motives. In the present case however, there are some obvious considerations, which may have their effect. The act is, in some respects, a popular measure; and the appointment of salaries, superior to the income of many livings, is an eligible addition to episcopal authority.

I have spoken of curates at the age of twenty-four for a very obvious reason. This is the age, at which candidates for the church are usually admitted into orders.

ders. The title they receive from the rector or the vicar, on this occasion, establishes them in the curacy, and the bishop fixes the salary. The incumbent, if he pleases, may groan under his burden; but dignity and opulence seldom condescend to enter into a minute investigation of other peoples difficulties and distresses.

Among those disagreeable effects, which may attend the execution of this act, the dissension, which it will naturally excite between the rector and the curate, is not the least. Mankind, in every station, are subject to human frailties, and the instigation of irregular passions. When the rector finds his property diminished, and his free-agency controlled by an arbitrary injunction; and when the curate is placed in a state of ease and independence, without being obliged to his employer, there

can be no great harmony between them. The curate will have his private views; and, if any dispute should arise, many of the parishioners will certainly join in opposition to the rector. Without supposing any grounds for a legal complaint, the situation of a clergyman, who is thus deprived of his influence and authority in his own parish, may be rendered extremely unhappy.

There is, I think, no class of men more entitled to esteem and consideration, than the elder clergy, who have faithfully and conscientiously discharged their ecclesiastical duty for many years, and whose whole support, in the latter part of life, depends on the income of a little rectory, or the small tithes of a humble vicarage.

Consider

Consider the situation of one of these respectable ministers of the church. He has spent his patrimony in the acquisition of a learned education, in order to qualify himself for the superior parts of his profession, the efficacious recommendation of piety and virtue from the pulpit, and the rational vindication of christianity from the licentious doctrines of libertines, and the absurdities of enthusiasts. But, after forty or fifty years, he finds his hopes of preferment vanished like a dream; his friends are dead; he is overwhelmed by the expences of a family, and depressed by the infirmities of age. The liberal sentiments, which he has cherished and improved by reading and reflection, add a poignancy to his affliction; and the debts, which the irresistible calls of nature have induced him to contract, oppress him with a double load of anxiety. As he has

no inclination to repel the iniquities of mankind by an application to the law, the fraudulent rob him of his dues, and the rapacious part of his creditors impose upon him by unjust and exorbitant demands. His profession precludes him from increasing his income by any species of traffic; and the principles of honour and virtue teach him to abhor the arts of the crafty, the schemes of the mercenary, and the adulation of great men. Under these, and many other disadvantages, he finds himself gradually sinking into imbecillity, dejection, and despair.

It is a great mistake to imagine, that education will supply the want of an independent fortune, or that genius alone will raise a man to preferment and opulence in the church.

Alas!

Alas! it is well-known, that poverty eclipses the most brilliant virtues, and obstructs the energy of the finest talents. Or, were these virtues and these talents actually displayed, they would be disregarded in the present arrangement of human things. Preferment is very seldom conferred on the meritorious. Modesty and learning retire from public life, and languish in obscurity. There they remain unnoticed, unpatronized, unpreferred. The livings and dignities belonging to the crown are given to the sons of the nobility, or to those who have parliamentary interest, without any regard to their qualifications. Private patrons bestow their favours on their relations, their dependents, or their parasites. The bishops indeed are prudent and conscientious men; but they have likewise their peculiar friends: ministers and courtiers must be

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obliged.

obliged. On these accounts an impartial and liberal patronage is not to be expected from the bench. Besides, as the gentlemen of the lawn generally succeed to their elevated stations in the latter part of life, when their eye-sight is obscured by age, and overshadowed by the mitre, it is natural to suppose, that they cannot easily distinguish probity and learning at a distance, in the humble vale of life *.

If this is the case, if the man of merit, in the evening of his days, is so far from receiving any reward, that he is subject to a fatal requisition, what motive, what encouragement remains for long and faithful services, for exemplary conduct, and extensive erudition? What man of genius will, for the future, enter into the church? Or who will labour through the

* A few noble exceptions must be made; which I shall take some other opportunity to specify.

thorns

thorns and brambles of science, when at last he is likely to be devoured by a beast of prey, thrown down a precipice, or plunged into a river * ?

The young men of the present age seem to be alarmed at this frightful prospect, and therefore generally pursue the path of ease and pleasure. Their time is occupied in dressing, visiting, sauntering, shooting, hunting, fishing, dancing, drinking, and attending places of fashionable resort. In the mean time the business of study is treated with contempt, as fit for none but drudges and pedants.—This representation, I grant, is by no means universally true ; yet a discerning spectator may see it verified in a thousand instances. And this

* Alluding to attorney's letters, writs, arrests, executions, &c.

will certainly be the case, while preferment is bestowed, on those, who have no pretensions to advancement, besides their personal connections. Our young divines will think it unnecessary to study, when they see their frivolous contemporaries elevated to ecclesiastical dignities, by other methods, with more facility and success.

A writer, in favour of the late act, dissuades the younger clergy from every attempt to become authors or editors, upon a presumption, that all hopes of improving their income by the pen are vain and delusive.—This admonition is more suitable to a Goth, than a man of letters. It has a TENDENCY to suppress every spark of genius and laudable emulation, and to encourage them in a lazy and illiterate life. He ought to have considered, that the art of writing with ease and accuracy is acquired

quired by repeated exertions, and that this accomplishment is to be expected of every clergyman. He is a miserable creature, a disgrace to the university and the church, who extends his abilities no farther, than to the performance of his weekly duty, and is qualified for no better purpose, than to lull a country village.

As the glory of a nation principally depends on its literary character; and the progress of learning will always be proportionable to the encouragement it receives, every person of sense and consideration will lament, that so many of our ecclesiastical preferments, the proper NURSERIES of learning, are conferred on ignorance and dissipation; that so many of our rectories and vicarages are not sufficient for the support of an incumbent, who lives on the most frugal plan of œconomy;

mony; and that a larger provision cannot be made for curates, in these instances, without producing very fatal effects on the comfort and happiness of the elder clergy. Instead of involving the latter in additional expences, and new difficulties, it would become the wisdom, the policy, and the humanity of the legislature to form a plan for some expeditious and effectual augmentation of small livings *. When this is accomplished, it would then be reasonable to require, that a proportionable addition should be made to the salary of curates. And if, at the same time, the patrons and guardians of the church would condescend to prefer those, and those only, who are, in some measure,

* I am very sensible, that a provision is already made for the augmentation of small livings by queen Anne's Bounty; but this Bounty is extremely slow in its operation.

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distinguished by their learning, exemplary in their conduct, and firmly attached to our happy constitution, they would perform an essential service to the church and their country, they would acquire immortal honour, and reflect a glorious lustre on the present age.

Yours, &c.

EUSEBIUS.

LETTER

LETTER IV.

SIR,

THE author of some remarks on my first letter accuses me of inhumanity, and says, that I am hostile to the late act in favour of curates. Both these charges are entirely groundless. Does he suppose, that there is no humanity in pleading the cause of a respectable class of men, the rectors and vicars of livings under 100, or even 130l. a year? And does he for this reason imagine, that I am an enemy to the unbeneficed clergy? A writer should view the arguments and observations of his opponent with accuracy and impartiality,

impartiality, before he pretends to charge him with cruelty and injustice. I have expressly declared, that every clergyman, who has a benefice of several hundred pounds a year, or other valuable preferment, should make his assistant a liberal allowance. Equity, reason, and humanity, require it.

I cannot however suppose, that the beneficed clergy are, in general, so destitute of sympathy and compassion, that they must be *compelled*, by an order from the bishop, to make a proper compensation to their curates for their services. The truth is, the greater part of them have it not in their power to be generous. Their livings, in these expensive times, are hardly sufficient to procure them the necessaries of life; and I leave every humane person to

to consider, what must be the effect of a compulsory mandate.

The act, which has given occasion to these observations, has a tendency to deprive the beneficed clergy of a privilege, which persons in every class of the community have a right to enjoy, the liberty of fixing the salary, which they themselves are to pay to their immediate assistants. This privilege is now thrown into the hands of the bishop, and the rector or the vicar has nothing to do, but practise the humble duties of passive obedience and non-resistance. Why the clergy should be thus fettered and controlled by an arbitrary power, I confess, I see no reason.

Before the late act, it was usual for the incumbent to give the candidate for orders a title to the curacy, specifying the salary he

he was to receive. The bishop very seldom interfered. The appointment was optional, and consequently the candidate received no injury. By the 12th of queen Anne, the salary was not to exceed 50l. a year. Some incumbents however in large and opulent parishes made their curates a more ample allowance; and this liberality was attended with mutual satisfaction and esteem. By the present regulation, the diocesan has it in his power, with or *without* the consent of the rector, to assign the curate 70, or 85l. a year, or a stipend, which may amount to three fourths of the annual income of the living. In this case, one party is oppressed, and the other not obliged to his employer.—I know a small vicarage, which seldom produces above 80l. a year. For a long time the vicar allowed his curate 40, that is, half the value of the living, with other advantages.

tages. This appointment, in a remarkably cheap country, was found desirable; for when a vacancy happened, the vicar had many applications; and the duty was constantly performed with great propriety. The incumbent, having lately given a title to a young man, soon afterwards received an order to pay him 60*l.* per annum. He himself, it seems, at an advanced age, is to subsist on the remainder!

The elder curates now in the church are certainly entitled to compassion. They may be infirm, or incumbered with a family. Such men, provided they are men of learning and virtue, ought to be raised out of indigence, and placed in a state of ease and comfort.—The bishops, I am persuaded, have it in contemplation to prefer them to livings in *their own* disposal.

It is alleged, that it is the duty of a dioceſan to take care, that every curate under his juřiſdiction ſhould appear as a clergyman. This is right; but he ſhould certainly take equal care, that the incumbent ſhould not be obliged to appear *in formâ pauperis*.

Generoſity is a popular, a captivating, and an exalted virtue; but, on this occaſion, I beg leave to quote the following obſervation of an excellent ſpeaker in the houſe of commons: “ I know nothing
“ more mean, or more contemptible, than
“ the pitiful deſire of catching generoſity
“ at the expence of other people *.”

I am, &c.

EUSEBIUS.

* Mr. Windham's Speech, relative to M. La Fayette, in the Times, Dec. 17, 1796.

F I N I S.

It is alleged that it is the duty of a
disciple to take care that every church
under his jurisdiction should present as a
clergyman. This is right but he should
certainly take care that the church
does not get into a state of neglect.

Consequently it is a duty of a clergyman
and an official to take care of his flock.
Now I say that to do this the following
conditions of an official must be in the
line of conduct. I know nothing
of the mind of a clergyman but I know
that the mind of a clergyman should be
in a state of alertness.